

Some Common Myths about Gypsies and Travellers



Myth: Gypsies have genetic wanderlust

Persecution has always been a factor in nomadic life. Nomadic life is created by two factors, the pull of economic opportunity and the push of persecution. Gypsy and Traveller culture has adapted to suit this by continually working within trades that are highly mobile. Historically, that may have meant working as agricultural labourers, nowadays, it means providing services in the building trade or products that can be easily transported.

Myth: Travellers get rich by not paying taxes

Gypsies and Travellers work and pay taxes just like everybody else. Travellers who live on Traveller sites may appear wealthier to the settled community because their wealth is more on display – they may not have spent over £200,000 on a house, rather invested their money in trucks, caravans and cars, which are more visible and also depreciate in value, unlike housing stock.

Myth: Travellers commit more crime

There is no evidence to suggest that crime rates go up when Travellers move into an area. All communities have a minority of members who may commit crime, Gypsies and Travellers are no different from anybody else. Media reports and images are often inaccurate and discriminatory and unfortunately, for Gypsies and Travellers, people usually believe what they read in the mass media and prejudices are formed or compounded.

Myth: Travellers are dirty, leave rubbish everywhere and destroy green spaces

English Gypsies and Irish Travellers who follow the traditional customs and the life-style of their communities have extremely high standards of cleanliness. The inside of caravans and houses are usually spotless and there are strict rules about food preparation and personal hygiene. However, for those who travel, the area outside their home is their workplace and keeping it tidy may not be a priority. When Local Authorities provide sites which have proper facilities for rubbish disposal there is usually no problem.

On local authority sites fly tipping is a real problem, with non-Travellers sometimes leaving rubbish near Traveller sites, often when they are located near wasteland. Furthermore, Travellers stopping on unofficial encampments may be moved on in the middle of the night and thus not be given the chance to clean up after themselves; leaving areas in a mess only worsens social tension and local communities negative perceptions of Gypsies and Travellers.

Myth: All Travellers live in caravans

There are estimated 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in the UK, two thirds of who live in 'bricks and mortar' (houses). There are an estimated 25,000 Travellers in the UK with no place to legally stop and thus with 'no fixed abode'. This is due to a severe shortage of Local Authority permanent and transit sites. A large number of Gypsies and Travellers still work in traditional trades which involve travelling around the country for work, with such a lack of Local Authority transit sites many workers and their families are forced to camp illegally whilst carrying out work in an area, areas which their families would have been travelling and working in for hundreds of years.

Myth: Gypsies and Travellers are work shy

Labour formed the bed rock of the agricultural economy until mechanisation and much of this labour was provided by Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. Traveller boys usually start working with their father's at around 11 years of age where traditional skills are passed down. Traveller girls carry out domestic and child-care duties from a very young age; cooking, cleaning and caring for siblings and often working as unofficial carers for family members. Within Gypsy and Traveller communities there is a strong work ethic, based on the need to survive.

Myth: Gypsies and Travellers are foreigners

This myth is perhaps mainly used in Britain. Newspaper headlines often include stories about Gypsies 'invading' our country. The reality is that Gypsies have lived in Britain for over 500 years and are part of this country.



For further information

Policing Gypsies and Travellers (2005) Dr J. Richardson Centre for Comparative Housing Research, De Montfort University,

Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers: Advice from the Gypsy Traveller Advisory Group

www.sussex.police.uk

Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month <http://www.grthm.co.uk/myths-and-truths.php>



Community Base, 113 Queens Road Brighton East Sussex Tel: 01273 234777 / Fax 01273 234778

E-mail: fft@gypsy-traveller.org / Web: www.gypsy-traveller.org

Registered Charity no: 1112326

Company (non-profit voluntary organisation) limited by guarantee – no.3597515